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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 001473

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FOR NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: AMIR MAKES IMPASSIONED APPEAL FOR COOPERATION IN
UPCOMING PARLIAMENT SESSION

Classified By: CDA Alan Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al Sabah appealed to the National Assembly and the media on October 3 to end the bickering and partisan sniping that has dominated Kuwaiti politics since the Amir assumed power in January 2006. In a televised address to the nation on the occasion of the final ten days of Ramadan, Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed said the strength of a nation "is measured through the ability of its people to work and cooperate in both good and bad times," and lamented that the "two authorities" (the legislative and executive branches) have spent enough time debating and "disagreeing over many laws that we hoped would be passed in order to place Kuwait on the roadmap for sustainable growth and development that others are enjoying." He called on Kuwait's media to "refrain from provoking sentiments and disrupting our reality in the name of freedom of press and opinion."

¶2. (C) Parliament returns from its four-month summer recess on October 30 in a tense atmosphere. The last session was dominated by Parliamentary "grillings" of ministers while legislation on governmental reform and economic development stagnated. While many Kuwaitis share the Amir's desire for increased cooperation between government and parliament, a number of MPs have threatened to grill ministers and do not show signs of willingness to relent. For instance, Islamist MPs have virulently attacked liberal Education Minister Dr. Nuriyah Al-Subeesh (currently, the only female minister) in recent weeks and seem set on a grilling. Dr. Bader Al-Nashi, the Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (the ICM is the political wing of Kuwait's Muslim Brotherhood and has six members in Parliament), told PolOff on October 3 that the ICM would meet with Al-Subeesh on October 4 to look for a way out of the impasse, but that he was not optimistic. Meanwhile, leading liberal MP Mohammad Jassem Al-Sager told visiting NEA/ARP Deputy Director William Roebuck on October 3 that the liberals would support the education minister and fight to avoid a grilling against her.

¶3. (C) Opposition MPs have also threatened grillings against the finance minister and Islamic affairs minister. Al-Nashi professed optimism that the Amir is not considering an unconstitutional dissolution of parliament, i.e. one in which the Amir does not call new elections within 60 days. However, he acknowledged that the grilling pressures would be hard to avoid. Continued grillings will leave the parliament and government at loggerheads once again.

¶4. (C) Comment: The Amir might be able to defuse tensions by radically changing the makeup of the cabinet, but this would be seen as a defeat for the government and might embolden opposition elements further. His other option is to dissolve the parliament and call new elections. This is a risky move for the Amir, however, since many observers consider it likely this would lead to an increase in the

opposition elements' representation in Parliament (although the new election law introduces new variables in this calculation). There is no lack of public statements from all sides about the need for increased cooperation, but the current state of affairs will make that difficult. End Comment.

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